

REMARKS

Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections to this application are respectfully requested in view of the amendments and remarks made herewith, which place the application in condition for allowance. Applicants acknowledge that the Examiner considered claims 7-17, and 37-41 to be allowable if rewritten in independent form.

Claims 1, 5-17, and 26-43 are pending in this application. Claims 1, 7, 8, and 16 were amended, without prejudice, to advance prosecution and to place the claims in condition for allowance. The amendments and remarks made herein are not made for reasons related to patentability and, thus, do not prevent the application of the doctrine of equivalents.

No new matter has been added. Specific reference is made to page 4, lines 22-25 of the instant specification, which provides support for the amendments made to Claim 1.

Claims 1, 5, 6, 32-36, 42, and 43 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Innami (U.S. Patent No 5,428,000) and Rueegg (International Patent Application No. WO200000031). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

The Office Action of June 27, 2003 stated that Claims 4, 7, 8, 19, 26-31, and 37-41 would have been allowable if rewritten in independent form. Applicants' Amendment of October 29, 2003 duly amended claim 1 to comprise all of the limitations of claim 4. However, Claim 1 was rejected again in the Office Action of February 9, 2004. It is not clear to the Applicants why this rejection was maintained.

Applicants take exception to the Examiner's basis for rejection, especially as the Examiner conceded allowable subject matter. Applicants respectfully urge the Examiner to contact the undersigned to schedule a telephonic interview to resolve this inconsistency. The Examiner's supervisor is invited to participate.

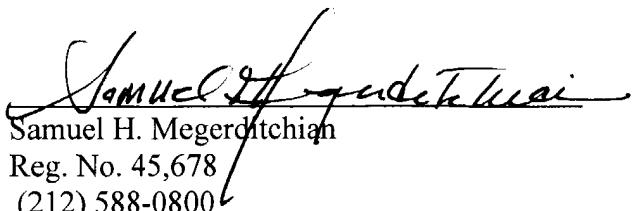
Additionally, the Office Action of February 9, 2004 stated that claims 7-17, and 37-41 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. Claims 7 and 8 have been amended accordingly, and reconsideration of the objection is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments, it is believed that all of the claims in this application are patentable, and early and favorable consideration thereof is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,
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